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ABSTRACT

Many members of the educational community today believe that political pressures have a major effect on education policy and institutions. This paper discusses four barriers that impede teachers and administrators who must cope with these new political pressures. The four barriers include the problem of meanings and definitions, the lack of perspective due to frustration over meanings, doubts about systematic investigation of political processes and behavior in education, and a sense of professional powerlessness among educators. The discussion draws from research in political science and sociology and from work by scholars in the area of the politics of education. The latter includes results from a team project concerned with exploring the education policy process at the state level in Australia and the United States. The paper concludes that the four barriers can be overcome: (1) by making meanings clearer: (2) by understanding how political and educational processes are interrelated: (3) by accepting the possibility of systematic exploration of political phenomena: and (4) by recognizing the critical role of professional expertise. (Author/LD)

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Exploring Politics in Education: Some Barriers and Some Theoretical Considerations

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Introduction

A decade or so ago, when I first became involved in research in what has now come to be called the politics of education, by far the most serious obstacle in encouraging professional educators in this country to seriously explore and come to grips with the political aspects and dimensions of education was a deep-seated belief that politics and education belong to entirely separate domains. Education systems were regarded as being apolitical, and it thought not only that politics and education were unrelated and separate functions of society, but that this was the way it should be. These views were widely-shared traditional, community sentiments. Thus, in discussions or debates about education objectives and policies, political leaders, interest group spokesmen and members of the public, as well as teachers and educational administrators, often made the bald assertion that 'education is outside politics' or that 'education should be taken out of politics altogether'. Of course, the reality was far removed from the rhetoric, and from the start public education in Australia had been deeply enmeshed in political life. Further, in particular education policy disputes, interested parties invariably used these catch-cries to advance their own causes. Still, such catch-cries came naturally to people's lips; their truth was seldom questioned, and they reflected long-entrenched values. These views about education and politics not only provided a barrier to professional understanding, but they also handicapped research into the political functions and aspects of education. They also are still the cause of some confusion about terms such as 'politics of education' and 'politics in education'.

The origins of these views about education and politics being separate are by no means easy to chart. In part, they were probably a product of the bitter nineteenth century conflicts over church and state roles in education and, following these conflicts, of efforts by interests supporting public education to maintain the 'free, compulsory and secular' legislative settlements arrived at in each of the six colonies. In turn, the operation of the highly centralized pubic school systems which tended to insulate teachers and school administrators from most direct local political pressures and a common Australian view of politics as being something rather sordid and not really respectable tended to reinforce the notion of education being

apolitical. In addition, ideas from overseas most likely provided additional support. Significantly in the United States, in Britain and in a number of other western societies similar ideas had developed, and in some cases somewhat earlier than in Australia.

In the United States, for example, the idea of educational institutions being apolitical was a particularly strongly held belief for a long period, and it had a marked influence on the development of the pattern of school-level governance that continues to operate even today. The idea of education being outside politics was first advanced and propagated by school administrators and professional educators, who sought to protect public education from the corruption and unsavoury character of much of late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban politics. It was also taken up by leaders of the late nineteenth century reform movement directed against government corruption, boss-run urban political machines, and other various evils associated with local partisan politics. Both groups had good reason to try to protect the public schools; according to Thomas H. Eliot, whole school systems had been 'blighted by the intrusion of certain aspects of politics, especially in the use of patronage in appointments and contracts in apparent disregard to give children the best possible education'.[1] In addition, school administrators soon saw other advantages in making education non-political, particularly securing greater professional autonomy for themselves, and safeguarding the continuity of educational programmes from the whims of politicians and fluctuating opinions of electors. The result was that schoolmen and reformers were able to have the schools singled out from the many public service institutions operated by local government for special treatment, and to build a whole set of myths, portraying education as a unique government function, one that must be 'taken out of politics' and safeguarded by educators who alone could protect the public interest. To non-Americans, it may be somewhat of a puzzle to understand how school administrators and reformers were able to secure this special treatment for the public schools, since in Australia at state level public education has been largely treated in a similar fashion to other comparable functions of government. According to two American political scientists, the explanation is to

be found in the place that public education has occupied in American thinking. They comment:

> Education has been the means to realize the American Dream. Not only does the school provide the knowledge necessary for success, but also it teaches discipline, the value of hard work, and patriotism - all values intimately related to The Dream. Moveover, the public school provides these things in equal measures for all. It not only transmits the democratic creed, but also is a product of that creed . . . Educating America's youth was much too sacred a rite to risk its perversion through practices which reformers believed characterize the world of politics. In a sense, the educational product is politically neutral, independent of partisan considerations and superior to them . . . Thus . . . the task of public education could not afford to be subverted by the corruptive influence of politics.[2]

While the Australian view of education has been somewhat different, some of the same thinking about the need for education to be independent and non-partisan was clearly part of our mode of thinking about politics and education.

Today, however, the situation in Australia, as in the United States and Britain, is vastly different; the old notions of education being apolitical have been largely forgotten, and the catch-cries about education being outside politics have been abandoned. This change has been brought about primarily by the increasing politicization of education; education policy has become much more a matter for public debate and political party competition, often differences on educational issues and approaches are openly fought about in the public arena, while school teachers have gained for themselves the reputation of being one of the most militant of the white-collar and professional occupational groups. In addition, I like to think that a decade or more of substantial research by scholars in the politics of education has played some part in convincing practicing professionals and other scholars in education that education institutions and processes are highly political in character. But whatever the causes of this change, the result today is widespread recognition among teachers, and educational administrators, and also often among members of the wider community, that political pressures and forces have a major effect on education policy and institutions, and that education is certainly not outside politics.

At the same time, although this old barrier to better understanding has gone, its removal has revealed the existence of other barriers - barriers which also tend to block or impede teachers and administrators coming to grips more fully with the political aspects and dimensions of education, and learning to cope more adequately with new political pressures and new political realities. In this paper, I propose to discuss four of these new barriers, and in doing so I will attempt to introduce some concepts and approaches which, I consider, have utility for anyone trying to make sense of the different forms that politics takes in education. The four barriers are the problem of meanings, the lack of perspective, doubts about systematic investigation, and a sense of professional powerlessness. They differ significantly one from the other, but curiously all four often find voice in the same kind of expression. How often have you heard a teacher or an administrator complain that a particular education policy decision was 'political', or that some new development was simply the result of 'politics'? Invariably in such statements one detects a note of frustration or even cynicism, and generally the speaker does not go any further to elaborate; the assumption seems to be that to say that a decision is political, is a perfectly plain and unambiguous statement, and that either nothing further is worth saying, or can be said. This kind of statement will serve as a stepping-off point in my treatment of each of the four new barriers. Basically my argument is that statements like these are by no means necessarily clear and complete. Moreover, they often reflect problems with basic terminology, they frequently are a symptom of a lack of understanding about what politics in education is all about, they sometimes are an expression of doubt about whether systematic exploration of the world of politics is possible and desirable, and at times they are prompted by a sense of lack of power by professional educators. But these new barriers too, can be overcome - by endeavouring to make our meanings clearer, by attempting to understand how political and educational processes and institutions in society are inter-related, by accepting that systematic exploration of political phenomena is possible and that appropriate tools are available to undertake this task, and by recognising that professional educators are by no means excluded from all things political, and that in a

period of increasing democratization of policy determination the role of professional expertise becomes even more critical.

In the discussion I will draw from research from the disciplines of political science and sociology, and from work by scholars in the area of the politics of education. The latter will include some results from a team project that I and various colleagues have been involved in over recent months. The project, funded by the Ford Foundation in the United States and the Education Research and Development Committee in Australia, has been concerned with exploring the education policy process at state level in Australia and the United States.[3]

The Problem of Meanings

When an administrator or a teacher says that a particular education policy decision was political, he or she may well consider that the meaning of this statement is perfectly clear, particulary if it is addressed to other professional educators. But this need not be the case and, in fact, statements like this often are made to convey many different meanings. The precise meaning intended on any occasion will depend on the speaker's view of what politics is all about, and on the particular context and the various participants involved; it may also depend on the particular audience.

What different meanings are intended by the statement that a particular decision was political? Sometimes the meaning intended is that the decision was taken on non-technical grounds. Frequently ministers, governments and official boards and committees make decisions on such grounds, and in doing so they often reject both professional wisdom and the advice of experts. There may be many reasons for doing so: the advice of experts may be financially difficult or even impossible to follow, or it may be electorally dangerous; such advice may be opposed by strong interest groups; or such advice may be administratively difficult to implement, particularly in the short term. Sometimes the intended meaning is that the decision was made mainly or entirely in order to implement a stated policy of the political party in government; for example, one of the main reasons the Whitlam Government abolished tuition fees in

1974 was that this was stated ALP policy, and also a commitment made by the Party Leader in his policy speech during the 1972 general election campaign. Sometimes, by saying that a decision was political, the speaker means that the policy outcome was the result of bargaining and compromise. Our research[4] on policy processes at state and territorial levels in Australia shows that generally major policy decisions are products of lengthy processes of consultation, both within departments and agencies and between formal actors and those interest groups that are regarded as having some kind of legitimate right to participate in policy-making. On other occasions, to say that a decision was political may mean that a minister or senior official made a particular decision in order to enhance his personal power or prestige, or that a policy outcome was the result of capitulation by the government to the demands of a powerful pressure group. Or again, to say that a decision was political, may mean that it was made by a government in order to generate electoral support, or to out-manoeuvre the Opposition. Still further, it may mean that the decision resulted from complications arising from current federal-state relations, or that within a department or agency bureaucratic considerations were paramount. And to this list we could go on adding still other meanings which are sometimes intended when someone says that a decision was political.

That the simple statement that a policy decision was political can be used to convey so many different meanings is not really surprising, when we consider that the word 'politics' itself is used in many different senses in everyday speech. It is frequently employed when referring to political parties and their affairs. Pressure group spokesmen, for example, often declare that their organisations are 'non-political'; by this they mean that they are not directly connected with any political party, and not that they have no interest at all in public policy or the affairs of government. The word politics is also used to refer to the business of governing, and to governmental or legislative institutions such as parliaments or cabinets. If someone says he is contemplating entering politics, he usually means that he is thinking about contesting an election to become a member of parliament. Then too, the term is sometimes used in talking about particular skills related to power and decision-making situations. To say that a person 'really knows how to play

politics', can be meant as a real compliment. Further, the word politics sometimes is used more or less synonymously with the worst forms of political behaviour - with corruption, the misuse of power, and the seeking of objectives for solely selfish reasons.

Apart from these usages, social scientists use the term politics in specialist or technical senses and frequently define politics in much broader terms as being essentially about matters of public policy and governance, and concerned with all those processes in society where power, influence and authority are involved. Many of them, for example, would agree with the noted American political scientist, Robert A. Dahl, that politics arises wherever 'there are people living together in associations, whenever they are involved in conflicts, and whenever they are subject to some kind of power, rulership or authority'.[5]

There is no real solution to this problem of meanings, especially when key terms are used in many different popular and technical senses. But we can recognise that this problem exists and that it inhibits effective and precise communication. We can also endeavour to do our utmost to make our meanings clear, and to explain in what sense we are using key terms. If we do this, we will make substantial progress in overcoming my first barrier.

The Lack of Perspective

When an educator says that an education policy decision was political, and then fails to elaborate on this statement, he or she may be displaying a sense of frustration or even cynicism. But as well, I suspect that often this kind of behaviour also springs from a lack of understanding about the political world, and how politics and education are inter-related. Of course, this lack of perspective is not surprising, since the links between educational and political institutions and processes in all kinds of societies are complex and often subtle. Yet without some sense of this perspective a teacher or administrator will find it difficult to come to grips with the many faces of politics in education. Lack of perspective then constitutes our second barrier to more adequate understanding.

Different researchers involved in work in the area of the politics of education use different kinds of frameworks to map the linkages between politics and education. Here I propose to explain briefly one approach which I have found useful. I will use the term education to refer mainly but not exclusively to formal education at all levels and both in government and non-government institutions, while I will employ a broad conception of politics to include not only the business of government and matters relating to public policy and political parties but also all those social processes concerned with power, influence and authority. I see the main linkages between education and politics falling into four related clusters: (a) education as an area of public policy and governmental activity; (b) the internal politics of educational systems and institutions; (c) the influence of educational institutions and processes on political life and behaviour; and (d) the influence of political institutions and processes on education. We will discuss each in turn.

(a) Education as an Area of Public Policy and Governmental Activity

In Australia education now clearly is a major area of public policy and government activity. On a number of measures undoubtedly it stands in a comparable position to policy areas such as defence, health, social security and trade.

In the first place, education in now a major financial and administrative responsibility for both state and federal governments. Since federation education has been regarded as a state government responsibility, and the various state administrations provide a wide range of education services in pre-schools, school, colleges of advanced education, technical and further education colleges and universities. Education absorbs a large proportion of state budgets, and the administration of education has necessitated the development of not only ministerial departments of education, but in many cases of departments of technical and further education and agencies such as higher or advanced education boards, post-secondary education commissions and adult education boards. Within state cabinets, the education portfolio usually goes to a senior minister.

Despite the commonly held view that education is a power reserved for the states and the fact that the Commonwealth constitution makes no reference at all to education, over the past three or four decades the Commonwealth Government has become involved also to a major degree in the funding and control of Australian education at all levels within

the six states, as well as in federal territories. In the tertiary field, the Commonwealth now has 'total' responsibility for the regular capital and recurrent funding of all Australian universities and colleges of advanced education; in addition, it operates a major scheme of student allowances. As well, the Commonwealth provides substantial grants each year for schools, technical and further education and pre-schools. To administer its various education programmes, it has established a separate department of education, a number of statutory authorities and various advisory committees.

Education is also an important area of public policy in that it attracts a great deal of attention in parliament and in the media. For many years education was a relatively non-controversial area, but for a decade or more it has become extremely prominent in public debate and often highly controversial. Strong pressure groups represent various education interests, and in a number of general election and by-election campaigns education has clearly been a major issue. Education is also one of the highly sensitive areas with regard to federal-state relations.

Education is an important area of public policy too because education itself is an important stake in politics. Almost everyone in Australian society cares about the quantity and quality of education and, especially, how it is distributed. Of course, people also care about the distribution of many other items of political goods. But education is probably of more vital importance to a great many people than most other political commodities. Further, its distribution to a large extent is in the hands of professionals. Like other stakes or political commodities there cannot be enough to satisfy everyone (for example, not enough top rated teachers or schools), so educators must make choices about who gets what of the resources available for education. Occasionally discussion about such choices becomes public and controversial, but more often it is settled by professionals privately away from public attention and knowledge.

Because education itself is an important stake distributed through political processes, it provides a number of potent political symbols. Many political actions or issues that are controversial or regarded as being of importance provide symbols that evoke emotions

and condense within them basic political orientations and feelings. Thus approaches or procedures such as open education, progressive assessment, public external examinations, progressive education and ability streaming often become arenas for intense debate and controversy. They represent all that is good or bad in the world as it pertains to parents' aspirations for themselves and their children, and the terms themselves become rallying cries and symbols for quite complicated sets of values and orientations.

Then too, education is political in the sense that there is major governmental involvement in the operation of education institutions. As we have already noted, state governments have established and operate schools, colleges and universities. The universities and most of the colleges of advanced education are controlled directly by their own councils, but still they are responsible to a state minister and parliament and come clearly under government influence, especially with regard to particular matters. The schools and technical and further education colleges are much more directly under government influence and are actually controlled and administered by particular government departments.

Apart from all this, as major employers, the various Australian governments provide a range of education services for their own employees and prospective employees. For example, most departments run training and in-service programmes, while at both federal and state levels there are a number of specialist government colleges, training personnel for employment in areas such as the armed services and policy.

In thinking about education as an area of public policy, systems theory has some utility as a conceptual tool.[6] The Australian political system can be thought of in one sense as comprising of a number of separate sub-political systems or domains, each concerned with a spearate policy area, such as defence, health, foreign affairs, agriculture education and so on. Diagram 1 shows such a conceptual arrangement in some detail. The policy areas shown in this diagram refer to federal government responsibilities, but do not correspond precisely with the current allocation of portfolios within the ministry or the present arrangement of departments. Each of these areas seems to be a major area of government responsibility, or related policy

activity, and often of public debate and discussion. These policy areas then constitute relatively autonomous sub-systems. In each there are key interests which make demands (the main inputs) on decision-makers. For each there are also particular decision-making bodies or individuals who often have a substantial degree of freedom in deciding on what policies should be followed, on the administration of particular policies, and on adjudicating disputes between rival interests. The decision-makers arrive at decisions or policies which are the outputs. These outputs in turn affect the environment and by 'feedback' mechanisms lead often to changes in demands. A simplified model for the education sub-system is set out in Diagram 2. In this case, demands and supports come particularly from teachers and parents associations, from non-government school interests, from employers and from professional associations and trade unions. The decision-making core includes the Federal Minister for Education, the Department of Education, the Schools Commission and the Tertiary Education Commission. The most important decisions usually relate to the level of financial support for particular institutions or programmes.

Although the education sub-system has a substantial degree of autonomy, it is by no means fully autonomous. Instead it is substantially affected by decisions made in other policy areas (e.g. in the economic policy area with regard to overall levels of government expenditure), and many key decisions in the education area have to be ratified or actually taken at higher levels, e.g. by Cabinet, Cabinet Committees and Parliament.

(b) The Internal Politics of Education Systems and Institutions

If the term politics is defined in broader terms along the lines indicated earlier, a whole new area of educational politics is opened up within educational institutions and systems. Often it is still assumed that educational systems and institutions are outside politics - that governments, parliaments, ministers and the like decide on policies to be followed, and that education departments, schools and colleges merely implement policy and get on with the business of teaching and learning. However, if politics is thought of as being essentially about authoritative decisions and the exercise of

Diagram 1

The Australian Federal Political System and Key Policy Sub-Systems

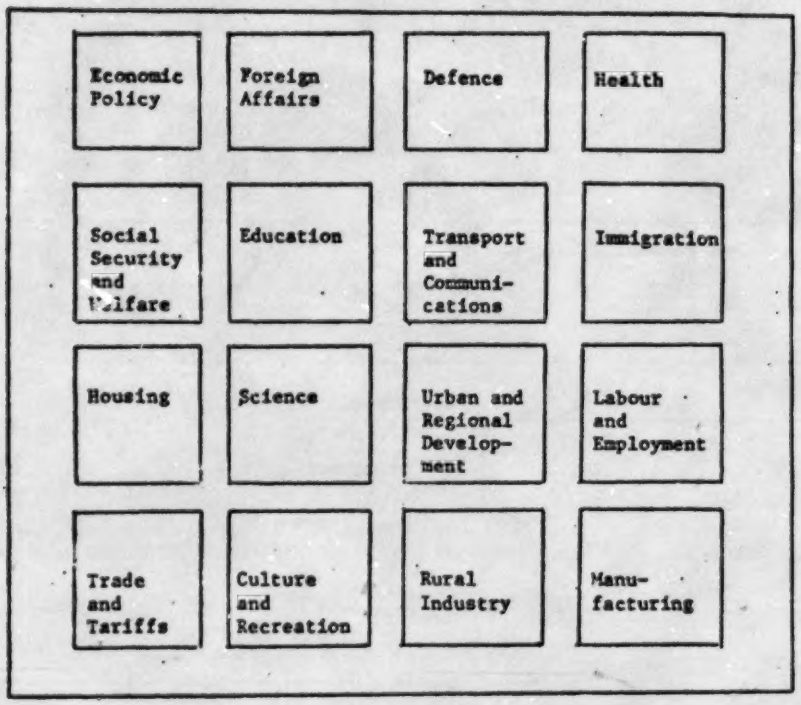
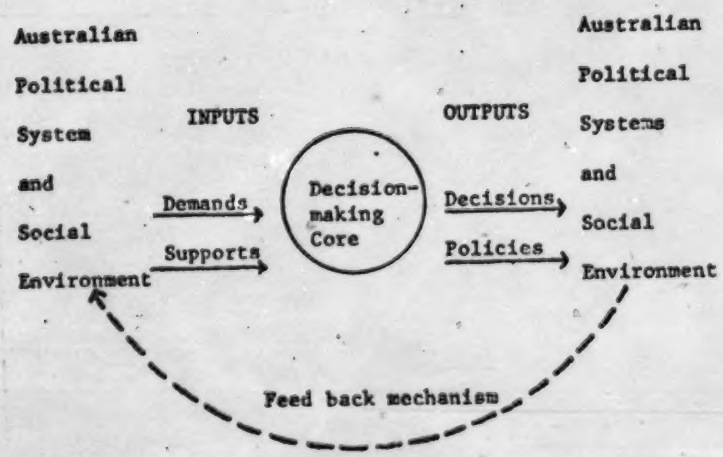


Diagram 2

Simplified Model of the Federal Education Sub-System



power and rule, then it follows that politics goes on at all levels within educational systems and institutions, from the senior levels of education departments down through the councils and senior administrative staff of educational institutions to individual departments and classrooms within them. This broader view of politics sometimes presents problems for those well accustomed to traditional usages of the term. Perhaps it would be helpful at this point to re-state this newer and broader view of politics by referring to a statement prepared in the late 1960s by a panel of leading American political scientists, appointed to make a review of the discipline of political science under the joint auspices of the Committee on Science and Public Policy of the National Academy of Sciences and the Problems and Policy Committee of the Social Science Council. They wrote in their report:

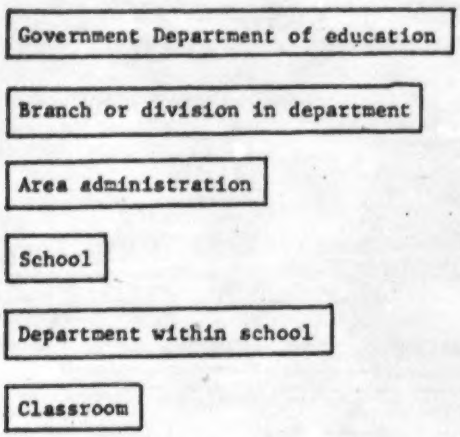
> Minimally, politics is concerned with decisions by which a society distributes its resources and regulates its collective life. By society is meant not only the territorial unit like a nation-state or one of its sub-divisions, but also units such as a nomadic tribe, a church, a business corporation, a fraternal association, or even an international body like the International Postal Union. From this perspective, even a small group like a troop of Boy Scouts or a family can be viewed as a political society. For all these collectivities, large or small, have in common the need to make decisions that enable them to pursue their objectives and that contribute to their maintenance. To do so, they develop more or less formal norms, rules, or customs, which are binding on all members, so that collective decisions can be made and their enforcement provided for.[7]

If we accept this view of politics, we can view both education systems and educational institutions as political as well as educational and social entities, and employ methods of political analysis to help understand their operation and problems. In doing this, systems theory can also be employed too. Education systems can be thought of as micro-political systems, performing all the basic functions of political systems. Admittedly, the political activities in some small primary school in most respects are relatively less important than those at top levels in a state education department or the Commonwealth cabinet. But in essence they are of the same kind; a

decision by a school staff meeting to implement a new instructional programme is just as political as a decision by the Commonwealth cabinet to allocate millions of dollars to some educational enterprise. Further, systems theory can be usefully applied to a number of administrative levels, going from an education system as a whole down to an individual classroom within a school or a department in a university. This is illustrated with respect to primary and secondary schools in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3

Levels to which Systems Theory can be Applied with regard to the Analysis of School Systems



(c) The Influence of Educational Institutions on Political Life and Behaviour

Education institutions perform a surprising range of important political functions. Perhaps most important of all is the contribution that schools and other educative agencies make as agents of political socialisation. Political socialisation refers to the process whereby individuals, particularly children and young people, acquire attitudes and feelings about the political system, and the kinds of political roles expected of them. This learning can be thought of as being cognitive (for example, basic knowledge about the system), affective (for example, postiive or negative attitudes to authorities or symbols), evaluative (for example, judgements based on the application of certain standards to the performance of political roles), or motivative (for example, inculcation of a sense of duty to participate).

Educational institutions are not the sole agents involved in the process of political socialisation; indeed studies suggest that in general the main source of Australian children's information and ideas about the political world is neither the school nor the family, but the mass media, particularly television news.[8] But the fact that schools have access to individual children for hours a day for at least ten consecutive years gives them a tremendous opportunity to influence ideas and attitudes, and there is good evidence to suggest that they do. Moreover, Australian schools, both government and private, deliberately seek to indoctrinate children with the basic values of society, and to instil acceptance of the political symbols of the nation and affection towards the authorities and the regime. Most schools and school systems still believe that this is part of their proper role and responsibility. Political information, attitudes and beliefs are conveyed to children at school assemblies, at observance of national days, and in social studies or social science lessons. But children are also influenced politically by the degree of regimentation and authoritarianism in school administration, by teaching methods and devices used by teachers to maintain discipline, and by the political outlook of teachers and peer groups.

But education institutions perform other political functions as well; briefly some of the most important are as follows. First, they help develop, formulate, and popularise basic social and political ideologies. Many political ideas which are now fairly commonly held in the Australian community were first promoted by university and school teachers. Second, the various educational institutions over the years have contributed significantly to political integration within the society. The highly centralised state education systems, despite a number of weaknesses in their structural arrangements, have helped develop and strengthen a sense of state and national identity; they have also helped bridge geographic distance and break down regionalism, and assimilate the children of migrants into the community. Through radio and correspondence lessons children in the 'outback' have been encouraged to see themselves as members of the wider Australian community. Universal compulsory education has also contributed to vertical integration, helping to reduce the 'elite-mass gap'. On the other hand, it can be argued, that the continued

existence of private and church schools has tended to accentuate established divisions in society. Third, formal education has a major influence on political recruitment processes. Education generally increases the chances of an individual to move to higher occupational and income levels, and so acquire political elite status. Further, without special kinds of education or without having attended certain educational institutions, individuals generally have little chance of competing for particular key positions in the public service or government. Fourth, universal compulsory education has been responsible for the achievement of mass literacy, which enables the effective operation of the present systems of political communication. Without mass literacy our political system certainly could not possible operate in the way it does. Fifth, groups of people brought together through the education industry, such as lecturers, teachers and students, often perform important input roles in the wider political system. Student groups, for example, in the 1960s, clearly had an impact on government thinking on questions such as Vietnam, national service training, and apartheid. Sixth, the operation of educational institutions and the implementation of education policy have various important political consequences. Among other things, they affect the types and levels of employment in society, social mobility and stratification, and the distribution of political and economic power. They also enable some individuals and groups to benefit socially and economically more than others, while the implementation of various policies helps generate whole ranges of new demands.

These kind of influences can be viewed within a systems model. In fact, it was through trying to employ systems theory to political analysis that David Easton of the University of Chicago became interested in the politics of education, particularly the role of educational institutions in the process of political socialisation.[9]

(d) <u>The Influence of Political Institutions and Processes on Education</u>

We have already noted that education political sub-systems are not fully autonomous. Instead many key decisions are taken outside education departments and institutions, and often by others than the Minister in charge of the particular education portfolio.

But in addition, a wide range of political factors affect education policy and administration and the operation of education institutions. For example, financial factors and government economic policies often have a major influence on decisions about expenditure in the education area. Then too, as one of just many areas of government responsibility and activity, education has often been forced to conform to general administrative patterns and operating norms. The result is that today public education is financed and controlled in a similar fashion to other fields of state and Commonwealth responsibility, such as agriculture, health or social services. Education departments are broadly similar in structure and organisation to other government departments, and generally they come under the same public service regulations and the same scrutiny of public service boards. Structural weaknesses in the political system sometimes have a crucial effect on education; a good example of this is federalism. Further examples are the way that any government's policy on education generally reflects its particular view of society and its political creed, and the habit from time to time for governments to make major policy decisions on purely party political grounds.

In this discussion of the main pattern of links between education and politics in Australian society, reference has been made on a number of occasions to systems theory. While this body of theory has utility for exploring connections between education and politics, as well as for pursuing more detailed investigations on particular facets of the politics of education, it should be emphasised that it also has clear limitations and a number of disabilities. Further, it should be stressed that there are various other bodies of theory and conceptual frameworks which can be usefully employed.

Doubts about Systematic Investigation

Our third barrier relates to doubts about both the feasibility and desirability of systematic investigation of political processes and behaviour in education. This barrier is more difficult to pin down, but I suspect that when educators dismiss a decision as being political they often, at least in part, are expressing doubts whether political processes and behaviour are capable of being

explored systematically and in a similar fashion to educational processes, and if they can, whether in fact this is an appropriate task for an educator or educational researcher.

These kind of doubts are still more prevalent among educators and educational researchers than we may imagine. Of course, this is not surprising, since many educators still think of educational research as investigation in the psychological-quantitative tradition; in fact, many of our university schools of education still offer graduate courses in research methods, which concern themselves exclusively with research in this tradition. And educational researchers, who demand the most rigorous methods in investigating teaching and learning, or the effects of a particular curriculum, often show a curious lack of vigour - or even an unwillingness to undertake any systematic data collection at all - when they talk about and speculate on education policy decisions and their implementation. Recently the ACER published an admirable set of essays under the title of Educational Research for Policy Making in Australia.[10] In these researchers and others provide valuable comments on a range of educational research, but I failed to find any detailed discussion of how in fact policy is made for education, and how research can, should and does contribute. More significantly the detailed data and evidence presented related exclusively to research studies of educational issues or problems; no one presented data about policy processes.

My argument is that these doubts provide another barrier to the development of more adequate understandings. Further, I assert that systematic investigation of political processes and behaviour in education is both desirable and feasible. It is desirable in order that educators may understand better the contexts in which they work, the various constraints that operate, and the possibilities and means of coping and of achieving change. It is feasible because we already have available a range of concepts, approaches and research methods. Admittedly, these research methods differ somewhat from those used in traditional empirical educational research; their fundings are of a different kind and order. But what we need are methods and approaches appropriate to the particular task.

There is not space here to review even briefly the substantial amount of politics of education research that has been produced over the past decade and a half, especially in the United States.[11] However, I wish to draw together briefly some work related to policy processes in education.

At its core, politics in education systems and institutions is about policy - about the content of policy decisions and the values they express; about how and when policy decisions are made, and who participates in these decisions; and about policy implementation.

Policy can be viewed basically as a course of action or inaction towards the accomplishement of some intended or desired end. It embraces both what is actually intended and what occurs as a result of the intention. Policy may also be thought of as a guide to taking future actions and for making appropriate choices or decisions towards the achievement of a particular end, and as the setting of solutions to a problem.

Policy needs to be distinguished from related concepts, which often are used synomously with the term policy. Some of these can be defined briefly as follows:

Goals:	the desired ends to be achieved. (Goals by themselves usually provide no direction for their achievement.)
Plans or Proposals:	the specified means for achieving goals.
Programmes:	authorised means for achieving goals.
Decisions:	specific actions taken to set goals, develop plans, implement and evaluate programmes.
Effects:	the measurable impacts of programmes (intended and unintended; primary and secondary).
Laws, regulations:	these are the formal ingredients or legal expressions of programmes and decisions.[12]

Three other points should be made about the concept policy. First, policies are not always stated; sometimes they are not written down or clearly identifiable in documents. By reviewing a series of decisions that have been made in a given area, it may be possible to deduce a policy. In addition, inaction or consistent decisions not to act may also imply a policy. Second, many policies tend to be prescriptive and thus subject to interpretation. Lack of specificity in intention

or action often leaves room for manoeuvre on the part of policy-makers, and particularly administrators. Third, many scholars find it useful to categorize policy by levels or types. One simple distinction is between general or basic policy, and administrative policy. The first is overarching and indicates a great deal of goal-relatedness. It usually has broad applicability to an entire organization and little in the way of specification as to actions. Administrative policy, on the other hand, is generally much more detailed and is concerned about what is to be done, where and by whom.

The content of policy, and the values and ideologies which underly different and often competing policy objectives are of considerable importance, and deserve much more emphasis and study. But because of space limitations, I will concentrate here solely on the policy process. Traditionally a clear distinction was made between policy-making and administration, and it was thought that within government departments and agencies that there was a clear differentiation of responsibility with regard to their functions: politicians made the policy, and administrators, even at the most senior levels, only administered policies determined elsewhere. We have discovered, however, that this distinction between policy-making and administration is by no means entirely satisfactory, and that even at comparatively low levels in complex organizations and systems, bureaucrats inevitably participate in policy-making, and at times actually make policy on their own.

Because of these and other difficulties, a number of researchers recently have found it more useful to think in terms of a policy process, consisting a number of separate stages or phases, each distinguished by particular activities and functions. These sequential stages form a cycle which most, perhaps all, policies follow. Different researchers have defined the stages in different ways; I have found it useful to conceptualise the policy process as comprising the following stages:

(a) issue emergence and problem identification;
(b) policy development and authorization;
(c) policy implementation;
(d) policy evaluation; and
(e) policy termination.

Participation in the policy process within education systems and institutions today in Australia is generally not the sole preserve of any one group or set of individuals. Rather the norm is for a range of different participants to be involved, including what we may refer to as formal actors (Parliament, parliamentary committees, ministers, cabinet, departments and statutory agencies, and the courts), and informal agencies (including pressure gorups, political parties and the media). Different participants obviously are involved in different ways; some, for example, participate solely in the policy development and authorization stage, while others are often involved in the implementation or evaluation stages, while others still may participate in all stages. Who participates and how also varies over time, from place to place, from context to context, and from issue to issue. And participants differ too with regard to their overall goals, their interest in different issues, their ease of access to involvement in the different stages, their resources, and the amount of influence they command.

Of the five stages in the policy process, we now know far more about the first two stages than the others. It was also on these two stages that our main focus was in the study of the education policy process at state level. In the discussion here I propose to deal only with these two stages, and to do so within the context of education policy at state level with respect to primary and secondary education.

At any one time, there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of potential issues that could become important in terms of education policy at state level. Yet over a limited period only a relatively small number of these will actually become issues, and even fewer will get on political agendas and thus become possible bases for the development of new education policies. This raises the intriguing and important questions of how issues emerge, and how they get on political agendas.

We began our exploration of issue emergence and problem identification with a framework developed by Cobb and Elder,[13] two American political scientists. They define an issue as 'a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources',[14] and they suggest that there are four main means by which issues are

created. These are as follows:

(a) Manufacturing of an issue by one or more contending parties who perceive an unfavourable bias in the distribution of positions or resources. (They label such initiators as 'readjusters'.)

(b) Creation of an issue by a person or group for their own gain. (They label such persons or groups as 'exploiters'.)

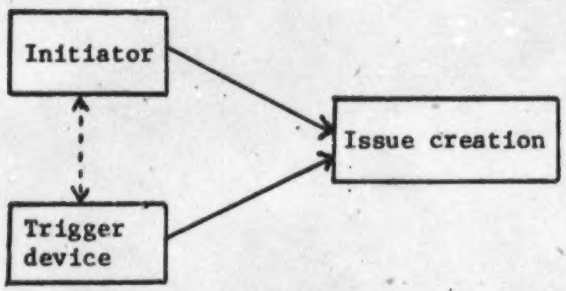
(c) Initiation through an unanticipated event. (Such events they call 'circumstantial reactors'.)

(d) Generation by persons or groups who often have no position or resources to gain for themselves. (They label such initiators as 'do-gooders'.)

Various triggering devices, or unforeseen events, help shape issues that will be defined by the initiators. These include natural catastrophies (fires, floods etc), unanticipated human events (riots, strikes), technological changes in the environment, actual imbalances or bias in the distribution of resources leading to such things as protests and strikes, and ecological changes such as population movements. The actual formation of an issue is dependent on the dynamic interplay between the initiator and the trigger device. This can be seen in diagram 4.

Diagram 4

Interplay resulting in Issue Creation



A trigger device does not necessarily result in an issue; instead there must be a link between such a device and an initiator who converts the problem into an issue for a private or a public reason.

Cobb and Elder define two types of political agendas: the systematic agenda for political controversy ('consisting of all issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority')[15]

and the institutional or formal agenda ('that set of items explicitly set up for the active and serious consideration of authorative decision-makers'). Three prequisites are necessary for an issue to obtain access to a systematic agenda: (i) widespread attention or at least awareness; (ii) shared concern of a sizeable portion of the public that some type of action is required; and (iii) a shared perception that the matter is an appropriate concern of some governmental unit and falls within the bounds of its authority.

Overall this framework proved useful in our research, particularly in directing attention to initiators and their motivations, to trigger mechanisms, and to the processes whereby some issues get on political agendas. At state and territorial levels, with regard to education policy, many different actors are involved in issue emergence. In dealing with the situation in South Australia, Jones says that

> the person who initiates the [policy] process is often neither the Director-General nor the Minister; it may be the S.A. Institute of Teachers, the Public Buildings Department, the [Schools Commission], a school principal, a principal education officer, a parent group, a teacher . . .[16]

And the various studies provide numerous examples of initiation by Ministers, Director-Generals, senior departmental officers, teachers unions, and other interest groups.

With regard to the manner in which issues are initiated and the motivations of initiators, some of my colleagues found the Cobb and Elder categories useful. For example, in their study of New South Wales, Hogan and West writes

> Each of the categories can be found in the emergence of education issues in New South Wales. 'Readjustors', who act to define established privilages or resources under challenge, can be seen in the 1968 teachers' strike where teachers saw themselves as falling behind their achieved professional and status standards. 'Exploiters' who manufacture an issue for their own gain, can be seen in the action of the Minister in the community and schools issue. 'Circumstantial reactors', whose activity is spurred by unexpected changes in society, the economy or some other critical event, can be seen in most of the cases.

> Indeed, such pragmatic, face-an-issue-after-it-arises planning is characteristic of New South Wales public administration. The fourth category of 'do-gooders', where group self interest yields to altruism or a sense of psychological well-being, is very obvious in the origins of the MACOS issue . . . [17]

But other researchers in the project found that these categories were inadequate. For example, in their study of Western Australia, Smart and Alderson provide case-studies of three issues - the introduction of the achievement certificate in 1971, the Free Textbook scheme introduced by the Tonkin Government, and the Government acceptance of responsibility for pre-school education. In the first case the initiative came from departmental officers who could not be described as 'do-gooders' in the usual sense; in the second the idea was long term ALP policy, and so the initiation was probably a mixture of alturistic and electoral motives; while in the third case the initiators included pre-school and other interests, the Liberal Party and officers of the Education Department. Further, with regard to this last case-study, different participants attributed different motives to others: Smart and Alderson explain:

> Because of the complex nature of the issue's emergence it is difficult to classify it in terms of Cobb and Elder's issue creation categories. As is frequently the case different perspectives on the motives for, and process of, issue creation. Some people in the Liberal Party including the then Minister, G. C. MacKinnon, and others in the Education Department considered there was, to use Cobb and Elder's terminology, 'an unfavourable bias in the distribution of resources for five year olds in Australia. They believed WA youngsters were not getting equivalent access to schooling (or pre-schooling) and that action should be taken to redress that balance. In this sense they might be seen as 'do-gooders' adopting an issue to right a wrong. On the other hand, many of the voluntary pre-school movement viewed these same actors not as 'do-gooders' but as 'exploiters' intent on implementing a policy for political and bureaucratic gain.[18]

Similarly in dealing with the way that the issue of the establishment of school councils in Victoria emerged, Bessant points out that in one sense the interests that pushed for the councils could be

said to be acting selfishly, but on the other hand

> many of the people involved . . . had no positions or resources to gain for themselves, and were in fact responding to a particular 'climate of opinion' in education at the time which stressed community participation.[19]

We also became aware of two other weaknesses with the Cobb and Elder categories of initiators. First, they do not provide adequately for one of the most common patterns of issue emergence in education policy at state level, whereby the initiators are departmental officers or Ministers or both, reacting to perceived administrative difficulties or mal-functions. Thus in Tasmania the decision to establish matriculation colleges sprang first from recognition by senior officers of the Education Department that the growth of non-selective district high schools had created a difficult problem for matriculation studies.[20] Similarly in Victoria the move to create administrative regions came primarily from recognition by the Minister for Education and senior officers of the Education Department that as a result of rapid growth and increasing complexity of function the head office could no longer cope, and that long delays were occuring in handling even simple matters which required routine approval,[21] while in New South Wales policy for excursions was reviewed in mid-1978 when departmental officers became increasingly aware that the existing brief policy statement for teachers and principals was inadequate.[22] Admittedly in all three cases, over quite lengthy periods complaints were made by many individuals and groups, but no one of these were really the initiators. Second, somtimes it is hard to identify a single initiator, since issues emerge out of a new climate of opinion developed over a period.

With regard to trigger mechanisms, Cobb and Elder's categories are somewhat limited in exploring education policy at state level. But certainly a variety of different trigger mechanisms are important. Sometimes it may be a major development elsewhere in Australia (for example, publication of the report of the Interim Committee on the Schools Commission in 1973 was the single event which led to school councils becoming an issue in Victoria[23]),

sometimes an election campaign (as in Western Australia in the early 1970s with the question of free textbooks[24]), sometimes a major administrative change leading to all kinds of repercussions (Mildern Mulford[25] demonstrate that in the ACT religious instruction in schools became an issue primarily as a result of adjustments to the move to a new education system), sometimes an overseas visitor (in Queensland the visit in 1977 of Mrs. Norma Gabler, a persuasive Texan 'textbook watcher' greatly encouraged conservative interest groups such as STOP, CARE nad Parents Campaign for Responsible Education, and accelerated their campaign of opposition to MACOS; soon after a teachers' seminar on MACOS was stopped by the Minister, and on 17 January 1978 the use of MACOS in state schools was banned by the Cabinet[26]). At other times there is no single trigger event , but rather series of incidents which operate to transform a concern or conflict into an issue.

The process whereby some issues find a place on agendas similarly is by no means simple. Certainly pressure groups are often important in developing widespread community awareness and a sense of public concern that some kind of action is required. Their task is made easier when the content of the issue can be well articulated, and particularly when a catchy slogan (such as 'back to basics') can be employed. Often issues change while they are emerging and as they find a place on political agendas. In the 1968 teachers' strike in New South Wales, a group of detailed complaints about class loads, extra lesson periods and salaries coalesced into generalized dissatisfaction with the whole handling of the administration of education, which then became more specific as a protest against the Public Service Board and Government, and finally became a protest with a highly personalised target of the Minister and the education member of the board.[27] In a similar way in Victoria in the early 1970s the issue of school councils provoked little real conflict in its early stages when if focussed on community use of school facilities and community links with schools. But later there was real conflict when the focus shifted to that of relative representation of various pressure groups on the proposed councils.[28]

With regard to the policy development and authorization stage of the education policy process at state and territorial level, it is clear that the formal powers of authorization are now widely shared among many different individuals and agencies. For many years formal powers have been more widely spread than has often been recognised; in addition, in recent years there has been deliberate efforts made to decentralize decision-making authority within education departments and agencies, and to involve a greater number of groups and interests directly in policy formulation.

Generally the pattern in each state is as follows. First, there is the Parliament, the Cabinet and the Premier. All three can be important, although seldom do any of them use anything like the potential powers they formally enjoy. Take the Parliament, for example. New legislation is subject to parliamentary debate and agreement, new regulations are open to scrutiny, education can become an important concern in debates on the budget (since it accounts for such a large proportion of Government spending), the Minister for Education must respond to enquiries from members during the regular question time, and annual reports from the Department of Education and other agencies must be formally presented. Occasionally parliaments or governments intrude to a major extent in detailed policy related to schools; recent examples relate to curriculum and other issues in Queensland. But generally parliaments leave policy determination on most matters to the professionals and client groups.

Then, next within the education domain, formal policy authorization powers are generally shared by the Minister for Education, the Director-General, the Department (including officers other than the Director-General and sometimes schools), and by a whole set of statutory bodies with responsibilities for particular areas such as curriculum and examinations for the final years of secondary education, the classification and registration of teachers, or the determination of salaries for teachers. In addition, often other major government agencies outside the education domain often have considerable regular powers in policy determination for education; these include the Premier's Department, the Public Works Department, the Crown Law Department. Of the state and territorial school systems it appears that the A.C.T. system is the one where the greatest number of decisions on education are formally made by other

than education bodies; there the outside agencies of particular importance include the Department of Finance, the Department of Education, the Public Service Board, and the National Capital Development Commission.[29] In addition in each state and the A.C.T. on occasions other government agencies too become involved in the making of policy with respect to schools; for example, recently in New South Wales the Anti-Discrimination Board became involved in the issue of sex discrimination in the appointment of school principals.[30] At times the Courts exercise major decision-making power on education issues.

Apart from this sharing of powers, many interest groups also play a significant part in policy determination. While interest groups seldom are delegated formal powers of authorization, key associations (such as teachers unions, subject teachers associations, parents groups) through representation on committees and boards are thoroughly integrated into the power structure of decision-making. Of course, this relates only to those associations which are recognised as being spokesmen for legitimate interests. Further still, the Federal Government and its agencies often exercise a decided influence.

This pattern of diffusion of formal power among many participants means that rapid change is often difficult of achieve. This can be frustrating to reformers such as Partridge, who complained a decade ago:

> To take part in educational reform in Australia can often by a very disheartening experience. The machinery is so cumbersome, there are so many officials, boards and committees holding the levers that operate it . . .[31]

Admittedly, in some situations change can be achieved quickly, and also against the wish of other key participants. This generally applies when one participant has sufficient formal power to act alone, and is willing to live with the consequences of such action. Thus in South Australia in the late 1960s the Minister of Education established a major inquiry into education against the wish of his Director-General; similarly in Queensland MACOS and SEMP were banned despite the wish of departmental officers, the Queensland Teachers Union and many influential educators in the state. But generally

the normal pattern is for policy change to follow extensive consultation. This consultation takes place within education departments and agencies, between different government agencies (including federal and state), and between formal participants and interest groups. Sometimes this consultation is informal; at other times the setting is a formal committee within a department (such as the Policy and Planning Group in the New South Wales Department of Education consisting of the four Assistant Director-Generals and the Secretary,[32] or the Policy Committee in the South Australian Education Department comprising the Director-General, his deputies and division heads[33]), a statutory board, or a committee of enquiry on which both professional experts and interest groups are represented. Thus perhaps the dominant characteristic of the style of policy development is the search for a wide-based consensus, acceptable to both government and the key interest groups. And while many of the individual participants in the education policy development stage often do not have power to initiate a major change against the wishes of others, they sometimes can successfully veto changes sought by others. Thus Directors-General have considerable veto power especially over matters which originate within their own departments, while teachers unions have successfully blocked changes supported by both administrators and parents; examples of the latter are the ACT Teachers Federation's success in eliminating proposals for lay involvement in the selection of teachers for schools,[34] and the New South Wales Teachers Federation's blocking of the Government's proposals for parent involvement in the control of schools.[35]

In exploring education policy development and authorization at state level various theoretical frameworks can provide help. For example, both the rational model and Lindblom's incrementalism can throw light on how participants actually behave and approach their tasks. The rational model[36] is based on the notion of rational choice and sees policy being formulated through a sequence of related steps, such as

(a) recognition that a problem exists;

(b) preliminary appraisal on inquiry into the problem;

(c) identification of goals and objectives;

(d) canvassing of possible strategies to achieve objectives, and evaluating of the costs, benefits and consequences of each; and

(e) choice of action.

I suspect that this is the ideal model which many participants carry in their minds; it also is probably the common starting point for any group or individual approaching a particular policy development task. But as Lindblom says, in reality a great deal of policy-making does not fit this pattern, and the model fails to characterize the distinctively political aspects of policy-making, its disorder and the consequent strikingly different ways in which policies emerge. Lindblom writes:

> A policy is sometimes the outcome of a political compromise among policy making, none of whom had in mind quite the problem to which the agreed policy is a solution. Sometimes policies spring from new opportunities, not from problems at all. And sometimes policies are not decided upon but nevertheless happen.[37]

Further, this model assumes a degree of perfection which policy-makers seldom achieve; generally they do not have time and information to consider all alternatives, nor to fully foresee the consequences of each. Often they may be unable to rank alternative higher than all others.

To cope with these problems, Lindblom suggests that policy-making is a fragmented process, being serial and sequential rather than comprehensive and deductive, and that policy essentially is shaped by a sense of political feasibility;

> It is decision making through small or incremental moves on particular problems rather than through a comprehensive reform program. It is also endless; it takes the form of an indefinite sequence of policy moves. Moreover, it is exploratory in that goals of policy making continue to change as new experience with policy throws new light on what is possible or desirable. In this sense, it is also better described as moving <u>away</u> from known social ills rather than as moving <u>towards</u> a known and relatively stable goal.[38]

The task of policy-makers then is to devise solutions acceptable to the range of conflicting interests. This puts a limit on their innovative powers. They consider only alternatives which differ

marginally from existing policies, because any greater change proposed would run little chance of acceptance. They seldom expect that a policy will provide the final resolution of a problem. Lindblom explains:

> Policy is not made once and for all; it is made and remade endlessly. Policy making is a process of successive approximation to some desired objectives in which what is desired itself continues to change under re-consideration.[39]

This, I suggest, is a better explanation of the process of policy determination once a committee has got down to work. Technical considerations are important, but often a great deal of time and effort is concerned with what is accpetable to government and to the key interest groups. And many other kinds of frameworks and theories are useful too - pressure group theory, bargaining theory, organisation models to name but a few.

Sense of Professional Powerlessness

When an educational professional dismisses a particular decision as being political, I suspect that this behaviour may in part spring from a sense of frustration and powerlessness. Certainly today many professionals in education feel under threat. The climate of public opinion has turned against education, governments are keen to reduce the level of spending on education services, and the schools and higher education are blamed for numerous ills. In addition, professional are worried about their loss of power. Teachers are concerned about the threat of parent domination on school councils and the influence of ideologically conservative community groups. Senior administrators bemoan the loss of their traditionally 'autonomous' policy-making role and in interview situations Director-Generals talk much more about the restrictions on them than the power they command. After a recent visit to Australia, where he talked with many senior state and federal education administrators, one American educator wrote

> . . . many state-level administrators believe their influence is being eroded - and that's bad. Politicians are getting too involved in administrative matters. Parents are challenging professional prerogatives. Militant teachers want autonomy but not responsibility.

> The federal government is meddling with state priorities. Taxpayers want more education for fewer dollars. In this view, the good old days of centralised professional leadership are over, and rough days lie ahead.[40]

A sense of professional powerlessness, then, constitutes another barrier. Professionals are discouraged, irritated, frustrated; they can't do their job as they think they should because often the real decisions are made by others. Instead of being decisions made by professionals on technical grounds, they are decisions made by non-professionals on what are seen to be political grounds. And one reaction by some professionals is to want to draw a clear boundary between the worlds of professionalism and politics, and to confine their efforts to the domain of professionalism.

This reaction is quite understandable, for in many spheres of life professionals feel threatened as their autonomy and expertise are being challenged and eroded. However, for educational professionals to crave for isolation from the political world is both misguided and unfortunate. It is misguided since the domains of professionalism and politics cannot be easily separated, and since in any context educational decision-making is seldom made solely on the basis of technical considerations. It is unfortunate since the need for professional input into policy processes has never been greater. Further, although the autonomy of professional decision-making is severely limited, many professionals, both teachers and administrators, have numerous opportunities to participate and influence the various phases of the policy processes. My plea is for professionals in education not to be too discouraged by the apparent limitations on their autonomy in policy determination, but rather to recognise the numerous channels that are available for them to participate in developing and implementing policy, and the need to develop appropriate skills to do this effectively. Study of the politics of education may be one way to help achieve this.

We have already noted that many formal and informal actors participate in the education policy process at state level. These various actors vary not only in the formal powers they command, but also in their actual infleunce in determining outcomes. This raises the important question of why some participants are more influential

than others - of what the determinants of influence are. One way of approaching this problem is through use of the concept of political resources. A political resource can be defined as

> . . . anything that can be used to sway the political choices or strategies of another individual. Or, to use different language, whatever may be used as an inducement is a resource.[41]

Different participants have available different resources, and differing overall amounts of resources. For the senior administrator some key resources are legal authority, access to a Minister or senior political office-holder, high social status, recognition as an expert, access to information (including sometimes confidential information), loyalty of colleagues, community goodwill, time, trust by pressure group leaders, technical expertise, access to public relations and information distribution bureaux and support from other government agencies. Influence depends on the resources available to the participant; but it also depends on use of the resources. Sometimes an administrator, for good reason, is not able or willing to utilise all potential resources to the full. Wildavsky has commented:

> That resources exist does not mean that they will be used fully, skillfully, or at all. Most people use their resources sparingly, with varying degrees of effectiveness. The cost in time, energy, money, and ego damage usually stems too great in comparison with the benefits which appear remote and uncertain. As a result, there is a vast reservoir of resources lying untapped by people who prefer not to use them.[42]

And administrators, like other participants vary in their skills in resource utilisation - in skills such as judgement about timing, ability to argue a case succinctly, ability to form coalitions, effectiveness in bargaining and persuasion, and judgement in anticipating the early reactions of other participants.

Some of the political resources available to the senior education administrators are fixed; for example, the formal powers of a senior administrator may be determined by legislation, which the Government in power may have no intention of changing. But others can be changed, and these include political skills. No one has yet analysed systematically and in a detailed fashion the various political skills that significantly affect how successful a particular

bureaucrats will be in policy determination in the Australian context. But we can get some clues from overseas literature. For example, in one recent U.S. study by Bardach[42] the key skills in achieving influence are categorized as skills is

(a) mapping the contours of existing policies and their audiences;

(b) skills in designing proposals and in seeking support;

(c) skills in building a coalition;

(d) skills in meeting opposition; and

(e) skills in manoeuvre during a struggle.

The first problem a participant must solve in trying to change policy in a given area is to understand the existing set of programmes and practices in the area, and to know who cares about them sufficiently to be mobilized either as political allies or opponents. The latter includes understanding of both ideological consensuses and cleavages, and of the patterns of factions, interests and alliances. The participant then needs skill in designing a proposal in such a way to maximumize its chances of securing sufficient support from key interests. By far the most important obstacle to this objective is the tendency for major policy changes to disrupt a complex ecology of organizational programs and practices and, consequently, to displease some interests in the long run and a great many others in the short run. Thus the policy innovator needs to be able to design features likely to invigorate rather than disturb. As Bardach says, 'Designs for disruptive change are relatively easy to conceive, whereas their counterparts require more sophisticated analysis and more disciplined imagination'.[43] The skilled participant can also sometimes work to mediate between the presumed incompabilities of his proposal and the policy preferences of key interests, and to ruin endorsement from neutrals. These tasks involve persuasion, and sometimes bargaining. Next the participant has to propagandize his proposal among others in the attentive public and beyond. This involves skills in presentation and marketing, since it is not simply a matter of winning endorsement but of persuading others to exert themselves in order to win the support of still others. Generally the experienced political entrepreneur concentrates not just only on interests who

are likely to be favourable to the proposal, but of these on ones who are relatively free to commit their resources to the cause. To move on, the participant also needs skills in meeting opposition. Opponents can hurt a proposal by undermining its sponsor's resources and credibility, and by maneouvering to set the arena and scheduling parameters of the contest advantageously for their own side. Last, the participant needs skills to manouevre in such a way during a struggle to maximize the chances of success; these include judgments about timing, about making details more widely available to different publics, and about appealing to uncommitted groups.

A sense of professional powerlessness, then, is another barrier. But this needs to be eliminated. Professionals have more opportunities than they often believe to influence policy, but to do so effectively they need understanding and skills. One good reason why professional educators should study the political aspects of education is to help them become more effective participants in policy processes.

References and Notes

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2. L. Harmon Zeigler and M. Kent Jennings, Governing American Schools: Interaction in Local School Districts, Duxbury Press, North Scituate, 1974, pp. 2-3.

3. The results of this project will be reported shortly in the following monographs being published by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne:

   1. Ann Scott and Roger Scott, Reform and Reaction in the Deep North: Education and Policy-Making in Queensland.
   2. Michael Hogan and Peter West, Making Policy in a Changing Context: The Education Policy Process in New South Wales.
   3. B. Bessant, Making Policy for Schools: The Education Policy Process for Victoria.
   4. R. Selby Smith, Decision-Making in Education: The Education Policy Process in Tasmania.
   5. A. W. Jones, Decentralization in the Central State: Some Aspects of the Policy-Making Process in the Education Department of South Australia.
   6. Don Smart and Anna C. Alderson, The Politics of Education in Western Australia: An Exploratory Study of State Education Department Policy-Making.
   7. Di Mildern and W. Mulford, The Game Changed: The Education Policy-Making Process in the Australian Capital Territory.
   8. Matti Urvett, Alistair J. Heatley and Frank X. Alcorta, A Study in Transition: Education in the Northern Territory.
   9. Frederick M. Wirt, Diversity and Turbulence in American State Education Policy: E Pluribus without Unum.

   In addition, a composite volume will be being produced under the editorship of Frederick M. Wirt and Grant Harman.

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